

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY of JUDGE AMILKAR VELEZ-LOPEZ

May 3, 2011

Sixty-five years ago America Lopez de Velez and Miguel Velez, received their only son, Amilkar Velez-Lopez, in the picturesque town of Adjuntas, PR.

He lived and studied in the countryside schools, then moved to San Juan, PR and in 1959 the family relocated to New York City where he began the eighth grade. Although he did not know much English, he received 'the Keller Heller Achievement Award, when he graduated from the ninth grade, for having achieved excellent grades and having overcome the language barrier.

While a student at George Washington High School in Manhattan he co-founded the Borinquen ASPIRA Society, in 1963, which was the only club allowed to use the designation of "society" instead of "club". This was one of ASPIRA's first clubs. In 1964 he travelled to PR with our first ever leadership trip as ASPIRA helped him enter Inter-American University in San German where he graduated cum laude in sociology, in 1968, with a concentration in psychology and social work.

He then returned to New York in 1968 and by following the philosophy of his parents who always believed that "He who perseveres-shall triumph", he was accepted at the Columbia University School of Social Work (CUSSW) from where graduated in 1970, with very good grades, and where he helped open doors for other latinos. While there, in 1970, he wrote a paper entitled "A Study of the Puerto Rican Community in Paterson", for Professor Nieves, which was eventually used as a resource at the School's library and by various groups and students. When he began at CUSSW there were three Puerto Rican students and when he finished he had helped increase it to 8 Hispanic students. He has had to face and fight racism always, as most latinos have also had to battle.

When he graduated from CUSSW he became the first Program Director of ASPIRA of NJ in 1970. From there he became a social worker in the Newark public schools Bilingual Program and eventually became its Administrator for a period of time.

While raising three wonderful children (Mynet, Miko and Katilia) and while active in the Newark and NJ Puerto Rican communities, he was elected as an alternate delegate to the Democratic Convention of 1980 and later was elected a committeeman for the Democratic party. He was also an

organizer of the NJ Puerto Rican Convention which eventually resulted in the establishment of the PR Congress of NJ

Finally, he decided to study law and graduated cum laude from Seton Hall Law School. While there he received scholarships and the Eugenio Maria de Hostos Award from the Spanish American Law Students Association.

During his career he has dedicated himself to being an example for the youth, to help them understand that any obstacle can be destroyed if you work at it.

He has been a co-founder of many organizations and agencies, in the cities of New York City, NY, Paterson, NJ, and Newark, NJ.

One of the programs is C.U.R.A., Inc., in Newark, that started with a desk in a borrowed office and now offers services of rehabilitation to those addicted to drugs or alcohol, and other services, in NJ, and has a budget of over seven million dollars.

Another organization that he co-founded is CASA DON PEDRO, in Newark, New Jersey, which is dedicated to serving the community in the areas of education, community development, weatherization, and other services. Presently it has a budget of over \$14 million and another investment in community development of another \$15 million

Other organizations are: The Newark Borinquen Lions Club, the Hispanic Bar Association of NJ, the PR Educators Association of NJ, the Association of PR Social workers of NYC, and others.

He is married to the wonderful and beautiful Norma Mutt-Velez.

However, one thing that makes him very proud is his lifetime association with ASPIRA. Were it not for the fact that it has been there for him through high school, college, masters degree level and law school, he clearly understands that he would not, today, be retiring as a judge of over 11 years of service, as an attorney in practice since 1980, as a social worker since 1970 and as a community organizer all of his professional life.

He thanks God for his parents and for ASPIRA for helping him succeed in life.